DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 461 643 SP 040 487

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TITLE	Focus on Teacher Salaries: Update for 1998-99.
INSTITUTION	Southern Regional Education Board, Atlanta, GA.
PUB DATE	2000-01-00
NOTE	3p.; For related reports on teacher salaries, see SP 040 488 and 489.
AVAILABLE FROM	Southern Regional Education Board, 592 10th Street, N.W., Atlanta, GA 30318. Tel: 404-875-9211. Web site: http://www.sreb.org.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Elementary Secondary Education; State Government; *Teacher Salaries
IDENTIFIERS	Georgia; Louisiana; North Carolina; South Carolina; *Southern Regional Education Board

ABSTRACT

For the third consecutive year, Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) states narrowed the gap between national average teacher salaries and the region's average. The regional average for 1998-99 was 88.2 percent of the national average. A year earlier, it was 87.3 percent of the national average. The average increase for SREB states was 4 percent between 1997-98 and 1998-99, compared with a national increase of 2.9 percent. Support for states' salary goals significantly influences this trend. In the mid-1990s, Georgia set the goal of raising its average teacher salary to the national average by 1998-99. Georgia's 5-year increase of 29 percent was the largest increase nationwide. North Carolina continued its efforts to raise average teacher salary to the national average by increasing the minimum salary schedule and providing funds for mentor teachers, advanced or national certified teachers, and teachers and schools meeting or exceeding student performance goals. South Carolina continued supporting its longtime goal of maintaining salaries at the southeastern average. In 1998-99, Louisiana increased its average teacher salary by 8 percent; a combination of state funds earmarked for pay raises and locally approved increases. A chart presents estimated average teacher salaries in 1998-99 and state actions for 1999-2000. (SM)

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Focus *on Teacher Salaries: Update for 1998-99*

SREB

Gale F. Gaines

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January 2000

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SP 039 187

For the third consecutive year (and in five of the last six years), SREB states have narrowed the gap between the nation's average salary for teachers and the region's average. New salary figures show that the regional average of $35,795 for 1998-99 was 88.2 percent of the national average of $40,582; a year earlier the regional average represented 87.3 percent of the national average. According to these figures, the average increase for SREB states was 4 percent between 1997-98 and 1998-99, compared with a national increase of 2.9 percent. Support for states' salary goals continues to influence this trend heavily.

Support for states' salary goals

In the mid-1990s Georgia set a goal of raising its average salary for teachers to the national average by 1998-99. Annual increases of 6 percent on the minimum salary schedule increased the state's average salary a little more than 5 percent each year. Revised estimates for 1998-99 put Georgia's average teacher salary at $39,675 — third in the region (behind Delaware and Maryland) and nearly 98 percent of the national average. Preliminary estimates for 1999-2000 move Georgia's average to 99 percent of the national average. This sustained effort raised the state's regional ranking (Georgia was sixth in 1994), and Georgia's five-year increase of 29 percent in the average salary was the largest increase in the region.

North Carolina has continued its effort to raise its average salary for teachers to the national average by increasing the minimum salary schedule and providing funds for mentor teachers, teachers with advanced or national certification, and teachers in schools that meet or exceed student performance goals. In the last three years annual increases to the average salary have ranged from 6 percent to 9 percent. In 1994, North Carolina's average salary was 10th in the region and 83.1 percent of the national average. By 1999, the state's average salary ranked sixth in the region and was 89.5 percent of the national figure. Preliminary estimates for 1999-2000 suggest an average of $38,336 — 92.2 percent of the national average — and a possible move to the fourth spot in the region (behind Delaware, Maryland and Georgia).

South Carolina continues to support its longtime goal to maintain salaries at the Southeastern average. The General Assembly in 1998-99 approved a pay increase of 3 percent for teachers, bringing the state average to $34,506. The increase approved for 1999-2000 is 4.7 percent. West Virginia also continued its efforts with the second step of a three-year plan to increase salaries by $2,250.

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In 1998-99 Louisiana increased its average salary for teachers by 8 percent — a combination of state funds earmarked for pay raises and locally approved increases. The Legislature authorized an $800 raise for teachers in wealthy districts and a $1,500 raise for teachers in less-wealthy districts. Local boards gave additional increases. The state's tight fiscal situation prevented a raise for 1999-2000, but the governor wants to raise the state's average salary for teachers to the regional average and is considering ways to finance this effort.

Estimated Average Salaries for Teachers, 1998-99, and State Actions for 1999-2000

	Revised Average, 1998-99	Estimated Change, 1998 to 1999	Estimated Change, 1994 to 1999	State Actions on Pay Raises for 1999-2000
United States	$40,582	2.9%	13.5%	NA
SREB States	35,808	4.0	16.8	NA
SREB states as a percent of nation	88.2%			
Alabama	$35,820	9.1%	24.8%	none
Arkansas	32,350	2.4	15.1	locally determined
Delaware	43,164	1.7	15.2	3%
Florida	35,916	4.2	12.4	locally determined
Georgia	39,675	5.6	29.2	4%
Kentucky	35,526	2.6	12.3	2.3%
Louisiana	32,510	8.0	23.7	none
Maryland	42,526	1.2	7.1	locally determined
Mississippi	29,530	2.9	17.4	8%
North Carolina	36,098	9.0	21.4	7.5%
Oklahoma	31,107	1.4	15.2	none
South Carolina	34,506	2.4	16.7	4.7%
Tennessee	36,500	3.3	19.6	none
Texas	35,041	2.7	14.8	$3,000
Virginia	37,502	2.3	13.6	6%
West Virginia	34,244	2.5	12.1	$756

Source: National Education Association, *Rankings & Estimates: Rankings of the States 1999 and Estimates of School Statistics 2000;* state departments of education in Oklahoma and Virginia; Southern Regional Education Board, *1999 Legislative Briefing.*

The Southern Regional Education Board endorsed 12 goals for education in 1988 and has released biennial reports that focus on progress in reaching these goals. This winter the Southern Regional Education Board will release a report as part of its Educational Benchmarks 2000 Series that will explore the progress made in reaching the salary goal: "Salaries for teachers ... will be competitive in the marketplace, will reach important benchmarks and will be linked to performance measures and standards."

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